

9 Ganka: trickster or endangered species?

An anthropologist's role in preventing the extinction of the New Jersey sea monster¹

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Introduction

Deep in the waters off the east coast of New Jersey, USA,² lives a creature called the ganka. Ask almost any commercial shark fisher who lives in a coastal town abutting the fishing grounds and they will describe the morphology and behaviour of the animal in great detail. Gankas look like a cross between a cuttlefish and an octopus. Indeed, ganka young are indistinguishable from cuttlefish young, and occasionally surface in the gillnets used to hunt shark. As gankas approach maturity, however, they grow evasive and somewhat mischievous. They also grow short, sharp, teeth. Some fishermen sport nasty scars from ganka bites. Gankas possess great dexterity, their long tentacles enabling them to move through water, and even onto islands and boats, with ease. Though not restricted to salt water, they prefer brine, never venturing too close to the mainland so as to avoid the abundant concentrations of fresh water flowing into the ocean from rivers. The ganka's unusually resilient digestive system allows them to eat a range of non-organic substances including plastic, steel and nylon. This possibly indicates a physiological need for roughage, but also reflects their curious natures and hearty appetites.

Gankas are a pest to fishermen. When boats are laying off the gear (waiting for gillnets to ensnare passing shark), and the crew are sleeping, particularly at night, mature gankas have been known to climb up the anchor rope and onto the deck of the boat. Once aboard, according to experienced fishermen, they will 'eat anything that's not tied down', including ropes, floats and gaffs (sticks with a hooked or barbed point). They have a particular penchant for gumboots. In order to thwart the pillaging, someone must stay awake, on 'ganka watch'. Usually – indeed, without exception – the person who goes on first watch is an inexperienced, uninitiated, 'green' deckhand.

The ambiguous ganka

Gankas are ambiguous creatures; they transgress the boundary between myth and reality. They also blur other boundaries that fishermen recognise. Half in and half out of the water, the boundary that shark boats – and shark

fishermen – straddle is important to fishermen both literally and figuratively. The surface of the water acts as a point of inversion, modifying meaning as things pass in and out of the sea. It is the very boundary that both separates and connects that which is above and below the water. For example, below the water is potential economic benefit, while it is above the water that this potential may be realised. Above the water a man is alive; below he is dead. When the creatures that live in the water cross into the air they, too, tend to quickly pass from life to death.

Gankas, however, are not bound by the interface of the sea surface, upon which shark boats are precariously perched, above which men can breathe and beneath which they sink into death. Gankas are at home on land and in the sea. They eat the 'inedible'. They are also almost entirely unknown to non-fishers who spend their lives on land. Gankas move easily between spaces that are connected and yet which seem mutually exclusive. It is precisely their liminal nature that, on the one hand, allows them to move across boundaries and, on the other, connects the domains that they move among. As with Icelandic folk-lore, 'anomalous water-beings ... stress the boundary between land and sea' (Pálsson 1991: 97), by moving between the two.³

Because of the ganka's ambiguity, its mischievousness, and its role in the social terrain of a New Jersey fishing fleet, it may be considered a 'trickster'. 'Trickster' is the name given to the creature, often an animal or human-animal hybrid, which appears in the mythological stories of numerous, often polytheistic (Hyde 1998: 9–10) cultures. Stories of tricksters, mostly from North America (Boas 1898; Brinton 1896; Jung 1956; Radin 1913; 1956; Ricketts 1966; Teit 1898, cf. Burnham 1998) and Africa (Evans-Pritchard 1967; Guenther 2002; Pelton 1980; Wescott 1962), have been widely documented and analysed since the 1860s (Doty and Hynes 1993: 13). Many are complex, and involve the trickster as an outsider or someone on the borders of society entering into a lengthy exchange of promises, goods and services, with a range of characters at various levels of power and authority within the community. Sometimes the trickster is a fool, who unsuccessfully tries to outsmart his⁴ opponents, or who behaves selfishly and deceptively only to find that his actions have unexpected creative outcomes for humans. Often, the tales are very funny. Tricksters star in tales in which they are destructive – mischievous, insatiably hungry and lustful – and those in which they are creative – life-givers, saviours and cultural 'bricoleurs' (Hynes 1993: 42–45). Tricksters also occupy an ambiguous space. They are often both destructive *and* creative. Judging from the analyses of trickster tales, they routinely serve to illustrate important social values and interpersonal roles, articulate tensions, or highlight inequities in the cultures in which they appear. As theriomorphic figures, or anthropomorphised animals who ignore the boundaries of the natural, the social and the spiritual, tricksters are cosmological artefacts of the most intriguing and incomprehensible kind.

Numerous attempts have been made to capture a definitive account of the 'trickster' (Hynes and Doty 1993; Hyde 1998; Pelton 1980), and some of last

century's most talented thinkers have grappled with him (Jung 1956; Koeping 1985; Lévi-Strauss 1963: 202–228; Turner 1969; Douglas 1968: 372–374; Evans-Pritchard 1967), many emphasising his underlying binary composition. The trickster remains, however, a slippery beast. As Pelton noted, over thirty years ago:

The logic shaping the trickster has been a rock upon which many good scholars have foundered. Most attempts to interpret the tricksters and their myths leave the figure himself curiously untouched; the many angles of approach which interpreters have used have not come to grips with his ambiguity.

(1980: 7)

It is perhaps this ambiguity which is the most common trait of the trickster, or the manner in which his stories, and the analyses of his stories, throw into question the basic social tenets of the society in which he dwells. It is perhaps also that each trickster must be considered in his own social context, which frustrates a common definition. If tricksters are jokers, we should note the words of Mary Douglas: 'a joke cannot be perceived unless it corresponds to the form of the social experience' (1968: 368).

Rather than attempt to fit the ganka into a model definition of the trickster (Hynes 1993) or to reshape the model itself according to ganka qualities, in this chapter I sketch the 'form of the social experience' (Douglas 1968: 368), or the context in which the ganka dwells. By 'context', I allude to the entire gamut of social and physical components of the life-world of fishers; these cannot, in practice, be separated.⁵ People, places, productive operations, environmental and economic realities, cultural, corporeal and oceanographic factors are all features of the ganka's habitat. In keeping with this holistic description, this chapter is written with the contemporary political situation of those in the New Jersey shark fishing industry in mind. The situation is one in which the life-world of the fishers – their productive demands, physical boundaries, and social relationships – is changing in response to adjustments to management structures. As such, the habitat of the ganka is changing. It is upon the point of 'ganka habitat conservation' that this chapter concludes.

I progress to this point about ganka habitat conservation in two steps. First, I describe the physical and social habitat of the ganka, and the function of the ganka as a creature that (1) helps to direct the deckie's attention to the salient elements in the environment and, (2) helps weave the deckie into the social fabric of the crew. Second, I describe how I came to know about the ganka, which was via the words of two professional deckies, Byron and Shaun, who have an intimate knowledge of East Coast waters and the creatures that dwell there. I discuss the implications of my knowledge, both for the community in which the creature dwells and for cryptozoologists interested in the ganka's dissection. My point is to highlight the responsibility of scholars to

promote the preservation of such creatures, not merely in academia but in their natural habitats.

Where the ganka dwell

The New Jersey fishing community on which this chapter focuses does not correspond to a particular town, or place, or even to a particular fishery. During the most intense period of my fieldwork, during a sabbatical at Rutgers University in 2010, much of the industry was made up of small-time 'lifestyle' fishermen (Minnegal et al. 2003; see also Ota and Just 2008: 305), with a strong sense of personal attachment and belonging to the fishing industry as a whole. In 2010 there were approximately 130 shark licences in the fishery, though some were latent, and many operations comprised multiple licences (shark and, say, sea bass or porgies). Of those who hunted shark I knew no more than forty. While many fishers professed to favour hunting particular species, and more senior fishers (owners and skippers) tended to focus on the species for which they had skill and licences or quota, most fishers' life-histories involved working in a range of different fisheries, including shark. The community encompasses those who venture out into New Jersey waters, primarily those who search for shark, or those who have done so in the past.

Though there are certain areas that are targeted more often than others, there are no specific 'grounds' towards which fishers uniformly direct their vessels when embarking on a shark trip. Rather, boats from different ports, including Belford, Cape May/Wildwood and Barnegat Light all have access to the same stretch of water. The crews of these boats all encounter similar conditions and experiences, and the vast majority have fished from multiple ports and vessels. Most fishermen can identify New Jersey boats from an impressive distance, and can provide a history of the owners, crew, and changes in species targeted over the years. While at sea, many skippers conduct radio or phone relationships with fishers from other ports, some of whom they have never physically met. Thus, the community of interest here is without well-defined geographic limits, without a common residency, and lacking in regular face-to-face contact among members. The community of New Jersey shark fishermen creates and maintains links through a demonstration of common experience that is manifest as gossip and storytelling and in the cooperative act of hunting shark.

How to catch shark

Shark fishers take to sea in small, low draught, boats – 10–20 metres – with a skipper and, ideally, two deckhands. When travelling, the nets are kept wound around a 'spool', which resembles a large cotton reel, on the deck of the boat. Once a fishing spot has been determined the nets are mechanically 'shot' into the water and left to 'soak' on the bottom of the ocean for six to eight hours.

It is during this rest period that the crew can have some time to themselves. This is a time for eating and other bodily functions, watching television, reading, repairs, chatting to other crew and, finally, sleeping. It is a time when the motors are turned off and the noise of the ocean closes in around the boat. Particularly if it is at night, it may also be the time when someone is required to go on ganka watch.

Lead weights and small buoys tied to either side of the net position it in such a way that it sits vertical in the water column. The 'gear' should rest so that the maximum area is netted. Because fishers cannot see their nets in operation, a great deal of thinking, speculation, adjustment and readjustment takes place in order to maximise the area of water netted, with the slightest advantage being judged worthy of years of tinkering. Details of how one configures their leads, buoys and other technical features is important information which is meted out, carefully guarded and seriously debated among some fishers, though many stress the rule of thumb; 'wet nets catch fish'. If the nets have been shot in the right location, at the best angle according to the tides and predicted shark movement patterns, migrating shark will swim into the nets and, unable to move forward, an activity that enables them to breathe, they die.

The physiological aspect of the shark most relevant to its capture, and to the socialisation of shark fishers at sea, is that the shark do not have a pocket of air to regulate their buoyancy; the 'swim bladder'. In other fish species, sound waves from electronic fish-finding technology detect this swim bladder and alert the watchful skipper to the presence of fish below. Lacking a swim bladder, shark are undetectable using such technology and fishers must rely on other signs to locate fish. Like fishers in other parts of the world (McGoodwin 1979; Pálsson 1994), those from New Jersey command an ability to 'read' the 'text' (Moore 1986) of the environment which reflects the intimacy of their productive relationship with their natural and social world.

Many of the deckhands officially employed during the period of my fieldwork were in their late teens or early twenties. Most who skippered or owned boats had begun fishing as teenagers, on the boats of their fathers, uncles or family friends. Fishers have, in the past, been socialised into the seascape as young (usually) men who, in the land-based community, have been in the process of trying to establish themselves as autonomous individuals separate from their male kin (King 2007). The skills to *be* a fisherman, however, involve learning to be part of a highly coordinated team in which the role of the novice is subsumed under that of everyone else. Learning this world – how to recognise its features and respond to its cues – is as important as learning to coil rope, sharpen knives and recognise changes in ocean swells. Indeed, the two are inextricable, and learning to be a fisher involves becoming holistically skilled; the ganka emerges as an important part of the education of deckies.

In a manner akin to that described by Davis (2009) in relation to Polynesian seafarers, New Jersey fishers gather multiple threads of information and spin them into an interactive map which enables them to navigate the

seascape with greater proficiency than had they relied on navigational charts, log-books, weather, fish-behaviour, gossip or memory alone. They splice these strands of knowledge, observation and intuition together, fashioning a stable raft upon which to proceed. Some material for the platform is gleaned from the natural world, both that at sea and on land. Tides, the kind of bottom being fished or the type of tree which is currently flowering on land, will provide hints relevant to the search for shark. The first function of the ganka is to direct the attention of the novice deckhand to those details in the environment that can, indeed, be 'read' as part of the productive endeavour.

Professional deckhand Macka explained that when readying to initiate a green deckie, one should point out certain environmental phenomena and comment, with the appearance of knowledge and conviction, that the conditions are just right for gankas. He imitated the ruse – complete with pointing gestures and a furrowing of the brow – with deadpan solemnity: 'You know, you say, "Oh, there's a Southerly, and the water's lapping at the boat a certain way and this bird, or that bird, is flying over: take care lad, it's ganka weather"'. The green deckie may wait in vain for a curious ganka to board the boat and devour his gumboots, even in the most suitable of conditions. However, games like the one Macka described compel the deckhand who may once have perceived a rigid distinction between, say, birds and fish, or may have failed to recognise subtle differences in wind direction, to appreciate alternative boundaries and connections and features of salience in the world (Ingold 2001: 113).

The most reliable indicator of fish in the water is fish on the deck. If even a small part of a shoal is detected then the rest can be hunted. This means that once the gillnets begin to be hauled, the skipper is accessing vital information regarding the location of shark. Are there shark or other species in the region? Which direction are they headed (which he can tell by determining from which direction the fish were meshed)? Have they been eating recently? How big is the shoal? If a shoal is deemed to be heading south, the skipper is under pressure to finish hauling and get the nets back in the water in a southerly direction before the fish change direction or somebody else catches them. At this point, time is of the essence and an efficient crew can get their nets back in the water faster than a less coordinated crew. Whether or not their speed has a calculable influence on the overall catch of the boat is less relevant than the fact that the cooperative efficiency of the crew is *understood by fishermen* to have a significant impact on the success of the boat. The ganka contributes to the social dynamic in which deckies move quickly and safely at the command of their skipper. Rather than being a relationship of pure hierarchy, the bond between a skipper and their deckies is one of interdependence (Dumont 1980), that I have elsewhere termed 'prosthetic' (King 2007). Deckies resemble literal extensions of the skipper; living prostheses. While deckies relate to nets, knives and fish with their bodies, many skippers engage with these items in a way that is mediated through the bodies of their deckies. Via their control over the bodies of their deckies, the physical capacities of a skipper are

extended, multiplied and strengthened. In a well run fishing operation deckies move around the deck of a boat intuitively, and they relate to the tools of their trade – the deck, fish, knives, cigarettes, coffee-cups – seamlessly. ‘The actions of others, contextualised within a shared world of understanding, inform their own’ (King 2007: 545).

Part of working and moving as part of a coordinated team is to understand one’s relationship with the other men on the boat, and one’s role in the system of collective action. Deckies are not simply lower down the ‘pecking order’ than skippers. However, there is a sense in which the directive to submit one’s body to the will of another is to embody an inferior role to the one doing the directing. Acquiescing to such integration requires some training and cajoling. Part of this ‘education’ often involves an encounter with a ganka, which initiates the deckie into the team, albeit as a minor, peripheral or prosthetic player.

As an anthropologist and a certified land-lubber, I am neither at home on the sea nor in the community of shark fishers, and I am certainly not one traditionally positioned to witness the ganka. Rather, my glimpse of the ganka was largely a result of persistence, luck and alcohol.

The night I encountered the ganka ...

I first learned of the ganka during an evening of heavy drinking at the home of Byron and Shaun, Belford deckies, and brothers. I was there with my friend, Fred, who skippered the *Pamela Joy*, upon which Byron worked. While I had fished with Shaun several times before, I had never taken to sea on the *PJ*.

Byron was a professional deckhand (not on a career path to become a skipper) of around forty years of age. Though Byron had a partner, she lived elsewhere with her children, and his home had only the hints of a ‘woman’s touch’. Byron and Shaun’s decorating style reflected their lives at sea, which had begun as teenage deckhands. Along with nautically-themed household items there were shells, rocks, bones and other items of curiosity which had emerged from the depths, been dried out and displayed. Most notable were the maritime books and magazines which spilled out over the ply-board bookcases and onto piles on the floor. The titles indicated a broad interest in anything maritime. Included in the collection were books on boat building, crustacean biology, archaeological accounts of excavated coastal caves, magazines specialising in boat sales,⁶ biographies of famous mariners and fictional tales set at sea.

During serious discussions about the environmental principles underpinning government fisheries management policies, both men could hold their own. Generally, however, their knowledge was expressed in the witty, common-sense, larrikin-style of many fishers. For example, one of their favourite sayings was ‘Fuck the whales: save the plankton!’ While obviously good for a laugh, the statement was a serious suggestion that the most viable

course of conservationist action in a multi-species, pelagic fishery was considering food webs rather than individual species management.

Their knowledge did not simply come from books, but had been generated over lifetimes of observation and experience. During fishing trips, Shaun would keep a small bucket of 'living curios' – insects, 'strange' weeds, plankton (or so he assured me!) – which he observed over the course of the voyage. I had seen other deckhands do this, and was intrigued by the intense curiosity these men showed for the smallest creature they found, or for the most subtle environmental variation they perceived. During my fieldwork, almost everything was new to me – strange and wonderful and noteworthy – and I could only imagine the depth of familiarity these men had with their environment.

The first time I went shark fishing, Shaun had taught me a lot about how to direct my attention to the salient items in the world around me (Ingold 1992; Pálsson 1991; 1994), a style of attention in which every aspect of the world was interrelated, rather than being an inventory of discrete things, ideas and patterns. Along with the other men on the boat, Shaun would point out islands, changes in the quality of the surface of the water, in wind patterns or fish behaviour, and what this might mean for us, for the fish, or for other species. I was often overwhelmed by the effort of recognising delineations and connections in the world that I had not previously perceived; this perspective was second nature to seafarers like Shaun. For me, that first, eleven-day trip was a harrowing and rewarding experience, during which time I struggled to acclimatise myself to the living quarters, the elements, the social dynamics, the constant motion and the seemingly endless, involuntary emptying of my stomach. Shaun, on the other hand, like his brother, was utterly at home on a fishing boat, wedged in behind the fold-out table of a tiny, cigarette-smoke filled galley with two other fish-gut spattered men, and a 'green' (in both senses of the word) anthropologist.

On the night of the ganka, sprawled around Byron and Shaun's kitchen table, drinking and laughing until we gasped for air, the social tensions which the three men understood implicitly as part of their life-world were slightly relaxed, allowing a glimpse into the fabrication of the bonds that tie fishers together. It was an unusual night for a number of reasons, not merely because of what I learned, or because we were particularly drunk. I had never been to Byron's house even though he lived virtually across the street from me. Further, I had the impression that Fred was not a regular visitor either; any drinking which took place among the men tended to occur at a local bar. In keeping with the relationships between skippers and deckies, in which the former are responsible for the latter, while the latter are deferential to the former (King 2007), this 'hosting' of a skipper by his deckhand felt out of place. There was something about the 'tone' of that evening in which the roles of the men present were slightly askew. There was an openness to their interactions, an intimacy, a subtle levelling of the hierarchy between the skipper and the deckies. Whereas deckies often fade into the background of a social scenario

and skippers do most of the talking (King 2007: 548), on this evening Byron and Shaun held the floor.

I could offer a series of hazily recalled anecdotes that would do no justice to the story-tellers or their tales. These stories would include accounts of novice deckhands, their young faces contorted with poorly-disguised fear as they prepare for their first night on ganka watch, as well as the postscript in which they finally realise the ruse and emerge as initiated fishermen. The stories would also include the peculiarities favoured by wily skippers and professional deckies as they prepared the boat – and the green deckie – for a ganka visit. One might reveal a ganka bite scar, collude with others on the boat in telling hair-raising ‘near-miss’ stories, point out ganka breeding grounds on the map, or give elaborate explanations as to why the deckie may never have heard of such a creature. In some cases the deckie might go on watch for several nights in a row, eventually complaining that someone else should take a turn. In others, the skipper might stumble across a bleary-eyed boy in the wheelhouse of the boat and, upon hearing he was on ganka watch, chuckle quietly, and return to his bunk. But I can only provide these first few glimpses, partly because my recollections are poor, and partly for reasons outlined in the next, and final, section of discussion.

Tanya: rubber-neck⁷

By the time I first heard of the ganka, I had been on several commercial fishing trips, both in New Jersey and abroad. Though these had been merely ‘tucker trips’ (during which I tried to work, in exchange for food and board), I was no longer derided as someone on the edges of the industry who had ‘never been, never seen and never done’. Given my lack of visceral adaptability to the motion of a boat, and the ongoing political, managerial and economic turmoil in which the fishery was embroiled, I had been spending much of my time at governance meetings both locally and interstate, and talking with fishers about the seemingly continual transformations these meetings concerned. As a result, I felt like I had a good understanding of both what happened at sea as well as the political context in which the industry attempted to operate.

I had also reached the point in my fieldwork where I did not feel like I was ‘doing fieldwork’. I had friends in the community about whom I cared very much, I worked weekend shifts at a local bar, I had traded in my ‘city’ boyfriend for a local timber worker and I attended weekend football games. It had become easier to converse with locals about local issues – fishing related and otherwise – than to make conversation with my academic colleagues. Though my place in the New Jersey fishing community was always mediated by my role as an anthropologist, I had become accustomed to my place. However, I was never *really* eligible for incorporation into the community of fishers – I was, like other anthropologists, merely masquerading as ‘one of them’ – and this was why I did not encounter the ganka in the flesh, on the deck of a boat. Of course, as

with other anthropologists, I was often convinced by my own performance. However, the events of that night at Byron and Shaun's, and my 'discovery' of the ganka, forced me to reflect upon my place in the fishing community more critically.

Initially, I was struck by my own sense of disappointment at having been spared the humiliation of being tricked into staying up all night on watch for a wily and fabulous beastie. Despite having professed to being interested in fishing 'culture' I had not been made privy to this 'anthropological gold' which was the ganka. In the coming days I chastised myself for not 'fitting in' enough to be deemed eligible for initiation, but then I regrouped and determined to find out as much about the ganka as I could. How wide did it roam? Did the morphology change as the ganka migrated? Was it restricted to shark boats? How common was the ruse? I would conduct a rigorous investigation of this creature, dragging the depths of the East Coast to uncover every last hiding place of the ganka.

However, when I came to actually question fishermen about the ganka I was struck by another unsettling feeling. I saw my friend Ryan the day after my 'discovery' and when he asked what I had done to earn such an almighty hangover I told him only the basics. I felt like I had possession of something that was not mine. Whereas I felt comfortable asking Ryan almost anything about the fishing industry, including trade secrets and his personal finances, this was different. I did not feel eligible to 'witness' the ganka.

A couple of days later I found myself on a busy Barnegat Light wharf. Though surrounded by bored deckies, most of whom could be cajoled into chatting, I found that I could not bring myself to ask even the more experienced of them about their encounters with the ganka. The risk I feared was that by discussing the ganka I would destroy its secret and thus its social efficacy. I tried inquiring about the creature from the perspective that its existence was a given. In the course of conversation I asked Mike, a quick and witty skipper whom I assumed had duped many deckies over the years, why gankas did not come onto the mainland. With only the slightest hesitation Mike explained that the freshwater run-off from the mainland was too much for the salt-water creature and that they tended to stay a considerable distance off-shore. However, Mike did not take the chance to elaborate on the ruse. I feigned satisfaction with his concocted answer, and was immediately consumed by guilt for my own deceit.

I never did ask a deckhand about the ganka, though over the next couple of months I enquired of several other skippers, who all reported similar encounters involving green deckies. I chose those skippers carefully, only when I was quite confident that they would be 'in' on the joke. The final time I asked about the ganka I foolishly misjudged my informant. He was an owner-skipper who had bought into the industry as an adult, without having apprenticed as a deckie. He was well liked but was different to the others. He did not demand the deference of his deckies that other skippers did; he let them drink some alcohol while laying off the gear, something not done by any

other shark boat skipper of which I knew; his number one deckie was a woman, who had taught him most of what he knew about fishing; he ran a charter business to supplement his fishing so was not financially dependent on sharking; he showed little interest in the politics of the industry and he did not smoke, nor drink in the local watering holes as the other skippers did. This should have alerted me to the likelihood of him knowing about the ganka or not. As one who was uninitiated he was not privy to the animal's role in the social and physical environment of the New Jersey waters. But in a moment of – what? Fieldwork fatigue? Stubborn curiosity? – I asked anyway. The result was that the fisherman recognised he had been excluded from this element of the community, which was an unpleasant realisation. Of course, I felt dreadful.

From this point on I began to chastise myself for being so greedy as to want the ganka on display for the whole world to see. I pictured myself as an eighteenth-century white explorer, proudly posing in a yellowing photograph with a rare and wretched animal dangling, lifeless, from the end of my gun. Could my fascination with this animal lead the ganka the way of the dodo? Would searching for this creature destroy it completely?

Conclusion

Gankas climb out of the blackness, across the interface of the living and the dead, and onto shark boats, partly because of a set of social and productive dynamics between shark boat skippers and their deckhands. Like gankas, fishers traverse boundaries that are ordinarily imperforate. In the case of fishers, they corrupt the integrity of the land/sea divide. While most people spend the majority of their productive lives on land, commercial shark fishers are regularly at sea for long periods, isolated from one set of social contexts, but enmeshed in others. In doing so, fishers act as the connection between domains which are, nonetheless, at any given moment, divided. Of course, landscapes and seascapes overlap and are both socialised places. We cannot discuss one without the other, just as the role of the sea creature called the ganka is informed by the productive demands of the community via which it lives. While the immediate function of the ganka in New Jersey waters is to initiate green deckies onto the appropriate rung of the maritime social hierarchy, this creature also acts as a useful metaphor for understanding the ambiguity of those who live their single lives in the very different natural, productive and social environments which emerge for those who are at home on the sea.

On the issue of the ganka as 'trickster' I have two points to make. First, whether or not the ganka can be classified as a 'trickster' is unclear. Based on what little I know about this mischievous sea-creature, it does not appear that the ganka qualifies as a 'trickster' in the way described by Pelton (1980), Teit (1898) or Hynes (1993). This is because the ganka was only ever described to me as being mischievous, and never creative or protective, as archetypical tricksters also tend to be. This brings me to my second, and more important,

point. Gathering more data about the ganka might resolve the question of whether or not it is a trickster. Perhaps the ganka does, indeed, display god-like, creative characteristics, along with cheeky, hungry ones. Maybe further inquiry would yield such stories. However, I cannot bring myself to ask New Jersey fishermen about the ganka in case I contribute to it becoming public knowledge within the fishing community. Gankas exist because green deckhands do not know about them; revealing the ganka would threaten that existence. To delve into the depths of New Jersey waters to discover the breadth and complexity of this creature would be to risk its demise.

Deciding what to do with sensitive or privileged information is not something new to anthropologists; what goes unsaid in an ethnography could fill volumes, and has (Malinowski 1967). In maritime contexts the important information is likely to include specialist knowledge such as carefully guarded fishing spots, and other trade-sensitive knowledge (Blair 2006; Wiber 2002; Wiber et al. 2004). I would argue that knowledge of the ganka is similarly productive information, as it helps shape the behaviour of deckies in a specific productive, social, physical and economic context, and which promotes a more efficient operation, or at least the perception of one. The existence of gankas in New Jersey waters is dependent upon the ecology of those who fish the region. Without the relationships among shark fishermen in which deckies are sometimes made the butt of elaborate jokes, ganka populations would dwindle to the point of extinction. As Douglas (1968: 367) notes in relation to the Norwegian fishermen described by Barth (1966), whose joking relationships emerged only at certain points in the productive cycle; 'the joking ... arises out of the technicalities of fishing'. The ganka is part of a richer world in which shark fishermen dwell, along with boats, fishing gear, mortgages, seafaring novels, wind patterns, bird migrations, family histories, government regulations and buckets of curios. Perhaps, as this world changes, the ganka will no longer be able to survive, or perhaps it will thrive. However, my own role, as one who is not initiated, is to conserve the ganka habitat by keeping the ruse a secret. Obviously (as I have written this chapter), I see academic value in documenting the existence of the ganka. However, to undertake further *research* into the ganka may destroy its efficacy on the wharves, and thus the waves, of New Jersey.

Notes

- 1 A version of this chapter was first presented at the Association of Social Anthropologists annual conference, Bristol University, April 2009. A revised version was workshopped in the Human Ecology seminar series at Rutgers University, December 2010. I am grateful to all those who commented thoughtfully on drafts, including the reviewers and editors of this collection.
- 2 The exact location, and other identifying details, of the fishing community described in this chapter have been masked considerably in order to protect the ganka.
- 3 While some zoologically recognised sea-creatures challenge the integrity of the boundary of the sea surface, it is only temporarily. Seals, penguins, and turtles

emerge from the sea for relatively short periods; flying-fish, dolphins and whales breach the surface of the water even more fleetingly. It is precisely these creatures, these 'anomalous water-beings', that often feature in folklore from maritime societies around the world, usually appearing as anthropomorphised protagonists (cf. Bernard, this volume and Schmidt, this volume). For example, the Hans Christian Anderson fairytale, 'The Little Mermaid', which depicts a fish-woman attempting to negotiate both her ocean home and the terrestrial palace of her lover, has been enormously popular worldwide, particularly among Western and Japanese audiences. As with folktales of mermaids and mermen, tales of seal-people or 'selkies' (a term originating in the Orkney Islands) have been recorded widely and reproduced in many societies (see Bernard, this volume and Schmidt, this volume). Selkies are able to temporarily shed their skin and behave as humans on land, donning their skins again to return to the sea.

- 4 The trickster is often, though not always, male. See Jurich (1998).
- 5 Indeed, the key boundary that gankas straddle, simultaneously dividing and connecting, is that between the social and the natural environments. As Ingold (1992: 40) suggests, the social and physical are mutually enabling, and we function in a world informed by boundaries of our own fabrication and realisation. These issues have been considered elsewhere (Barth 1969; 2000; Bateson 1972; Cohen 2000; Ingold 2000; King 2005; 2007; Milton 2002; Pálsson 1994; Roepstorff and Bubandt 2003).
- 6 Such boat-trading periodicals are referred to colloquially by some as 'fishermen's stick-mags', in jocular reference to their insatiable fascination with boats.
- 7 'Rubber-neck' was one of the nicknames I was given during my fieldwork, a good-natured term meant to capture my position as a 'tourist' in the fishing community.

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